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SUBJECT Soviet Spies in Britain

FORREST SAWYER: Our cover story this morning. Has the Soviet KGB been dealt a knockout blow in Britain? The head of the KGB in Britain has defected. And immediately after that, Britain has expelled 25 Soviet diplomats for allegedly spying.

Two guests are joining us to discuss this apparent blow to the spy network. Live from our bureau in Washington, Admiral Stansfield Turner. He is the former Director of the CIA. He is a consultant to CBS News. And live from our London bureau, Brian Freemantle. He is an author who has been studying the KGB for many years.

This man is named Oleg Gordievski, Mr. Freemantle. Can you tell us a little about who he is and why this defection is so important?

BRIAN FREEMANTLE: Yes, I can. He is possibly the most important defector to come across to the West in 20-25 years, maybe even longer than that. And his value to the West is not just because he is the chief of the KGB in Britain and will enable us to roll up completely the KGB system here. Before he came here, he was in Denmark. He worked with extensively with the Danes. His period of spying for the West stretches back about ten years.

But even more important than that, before he was sent to the West, in Moscow Center, in Dzerzhinsky Square, his function was to train and infiltrate into the West people who are called illegals. These are people who are sent in over a long period of time to settle into the West, to get jobs, to marry, to settle down and become citizens of whatever country they're chosen to be in. And they are activated after maybe 10 to 15 years.

Gordievski knows the identities of all these people. Some will have moved, but he -- but Moscow will not know who he can identify and who he can't.

This, I think, at the moment, is going to be Moscow's chief concern. He can roll up and blow a lot, a very great deal of KGB activities throughout the West and throughout America.

SAWYER: All right. Let me ask Admiral Turner.

Admiral Turner, you point out a point that's very intriguing to you. The man has actually been a double agent, apparently, for over ten years. Why should he come in from the cold now? Couldn't he be more helpful to the Brits and to the Danes as a double agent?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Well, there are a couple of reasons for that. One is, of course, the KGB maybe got a tip-off and may be hot on his trail.

The second, of course, is that he may want to come in from the cold. He may want to start enjoying the kind of Western life that he has seen and he wants to be part of, rather than that repressive Soviet lifestyle.

SAWYER: How can we be certain that the information that he is now giving us is, in its turn, possibly disinformation that the KGB would like to put across?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, you take every defector with a grain of salt and you put him through a lot of tests. You check his information against other information that you have from totally separate sources. You do things even to entrap him. You'll try to set him up, so that if he has something he wants to pass back to the Russians, that you'll catch him doing it. You have to be very cautious.

But most of all, you don't give him any of your own secrets so that he could pass anything back if he were a double agent.

SAWYER: What about that, Mr. Freemantle? Are you confident that the gentleman is all that he claims to be?

FREEMANTLE: Certainly the guidance I'm getting from British intelligence is that they believe him to be who he says he is, they believe in his bona fides.

Although I agree with Admiral Turner. He will be treated very cautiously. There have been occasions before when the KGB leaked something to the West in a disinformation exercise. I certainly don't think that this occasion is a disinformation. I said, as I say before, I think he's the most important

person to come across for a very, very long time.

SAWYER: A striking thing, Mr. Freemantle -- and briefly -- is that 25 Soviet diplomats, some of them rather high-ranking, are immediately expelled. Which suggests that the Soviet spy network is extraordinarily extensive.

FREEMANTLE: Well, in fact, I know that there are at least -- our counterintelligence holds the names of 75 to 100 agents. And the threat has been made in a diplomatic way to Moscow that depending upon Moscow's reaction, if they overreact, if they try and expel more than the ratio of our people from Moscow, then we will expel more people from here, and get into a tit-for-tat situation.

SAWYER: Admiral, will life go on as usual after this? Just another episode in the spy game?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. I don't see a long-term implication here. But it's certainly going to make it a lot easier for Britain, and hopefully for the rest of the West, to protect itself from Soviet spying.

SAWYER: So, one for the West this time.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes, indeed.

SAWYER: Admiral Stansfield Turner and Mr. Freemantle, thank you both for joining us.